

Translations



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The Present Society and How It is Understanding Itself Through the Translated Puranas of Bibek Debroy: A Bicameral Comprehension of the Pop Culture Mythology and the Actual Reality

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Abstract: With the advent of translation, the relevance of the *puranas* has become quite functional in a logically advanced world. Substantial rise of sensible writers and intellectuals of a new age India who are more focused in understanding the inner world and the complexities of our bicameral mind is a topic that deserves good observation. The identification of a ritual-based *Rig Vedic* era and the development of rationality during the time of the *Upanishads* is now a prominent way to decrypt the situations of both these periods. The translation of the *Brahma-Purana* and the *Markandeya Purana* is a significant contribution in this field to use semiotic verses to magnify the feminine (*Shakti*) and masculine (*Brahma*) dimensions of the *Sanatana Dharma*. The rise in the pop-culture mythological literature juxtaposed with the present advances in the form of fiction is a consequence of the translational reality.

Keywords: *Translation, semiotic, puranas, mythology.*

Introduction

The sudden advent or increase in the number of translated documents in the genre of fiction and non-fiction is not quite surprising. One particular society always wants to read itself more than any other society that keeps the relevance of translation alive. This has been happening from quite a few decades ripening and curating the somatic structural identity of a piece of literature. Criticism is not obsolete over here since we are working towards translating major contributions of this *rashtra*. So, translating or interpreting a sharp-edged knife into a metaphorical one would become absolutely disgraceful for the author/s and the philosophy of the world of the treatises and vice-versa. Therefore, before going for the task of translation,

even the best ones, it is better to take note of what should be the bigger picture, just to know the chunks on a personal level. Keeping things personal also has a disadvantage. Somewhere an artist forgets the role of staying an observer, which ferments the arousal, quietly and slowly. Working towards watering every single seed that sprouts from a translated piece, demands our craving.

Bibek Debroy has been shedding the dust smoothly for almost a decade by seeking through the actual realities of the *shastras* of Sanatana Dharma. Although traditionalists have a notion that translating scriptures written in major Indic languages, Sanskrit or Prakrit, through a colonial language would make things messy. It still stands true since many mythologists and historians of both the like Devdutt Pattanaik, Wendy Doniger, Audrey Truschke and others have been interpreting scriptures by translating verses to foreground their ideology. If we revisit Osho too, we would find the shadow of liberalism slaughtering the philosophy of Sanatana. Debroy stands apart from all of them since he consciously chose to not alter the very core of Dharma, where decrypting of the verses lies in our hand. If I have to play the devil's advocate then, I would say that limiting the scriptures to Brahmins was not a bad decision if seen from the lens of the major authors of almost all the scriptures. Although they messed it up by deliberately maligning or subjectively destroying the treatises, if we go by the scriptures, then those with *Brahmatya* or *Brahma gyana*, would only be able to fathom what an encrypted verse is trying to say, keeping the *Parabrahman* in mind. Debroy is not concerned about how the liberal world is going to lose itself in the middle of his translated works.

Some of his major works include the translation of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Markandeya Purana*, the *Valmiki Ramayana*, the complete *Mahabharata*, and the *Brahma Purana*. While the *Bhagavatam* talks about the Vaishnavite School of Philosophy through Sri Krishna's ideas, *Markandeya Purana* explores the philosophy of Mahadevi or simply Devi (not to be confused with the Devi-Bhagavata Purana of Maharishi Veda Vyasa). I deliberately chose to not include his translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Harivamsha*, which strengthens my inclination towards his gigantic work on the epic we know as the *Mahabharata*. The entire collection relies on the actual *Mahabharata* without relying on the other interpretations of the same. The *Brahma Purana* can easily be called as the womb of everything that Sanatana Dharma stands on. It is more about the process of creation of the universe from the perspective of Brahma. Since it is the first purana out of all other puranas, it is also known as *Adi Purana*. Although, this purana proceeds with conversation between Lord Brahma and King Daksha, and how Narayana happens to be the core of everything – it also makes some serious attempts

to coalesce other schools with its own philosophy. Therefore, neither a Vaishnavite nor a follower of Tantra Vidya owns it.

Mythology deteriorated and developed with the birth of pop-culture narrative. This particular one demands to create a fiction that is pretty much opposite to what Dharma has to offer. For this particular reason, Ashwin Sanghi, Kavita Kane and Saksham Garg stand out among all those who have been penning fiction on the pedestal of Sanatana Dharma. Bibek Debroy herein, has a lot to offer since anyone who has something to introduce for the young generation of the present and future, can easily find the fluidity inside Debroy's translations. Writers-cum-mythologists like Anand Neelakantan have wonderful ideas to offer, but they have developed their own world wherein the 'woke people' find solace. The one thing that a few mythologists have started is to bring the Adharmis, into the better side of the morning by attaching them with the seriously toxic Dravidian School of Political Thought. I refrain from calling this a philosophy since it has been spreading the venom of division in the Sanatana Dharma for the past hundred years and it is saddening to see mythologists getting owned by the propaganda.

The Problems with the Present Society and Its Mythology

The major problems of the present society lie in its easily volatile socio-political narratives and wings. Also, if it is not volatile, it breeds its rigidity. This particular form of rigidity is not what we have been fed as tradition. Rather it is the very trend of not accepting what is there on the other side of the coin that has led to various kinds of misunderstandings. Three things have been happening for past five decades:

1. An entire portion of the society believes in the Sanatana Dharma by knowing almost nothing about it, but has the audacity to own whatever comes from the great Hindu civilization. Owning any kind of concept is fine, but if possession, dictatorship, supremacy comes hand-in-hand with ownership – that is a big problem.
2. The other kind is ignorant and with time has started to understand that they are being rated higher than their expectations. Yet somehow no one calls them out or takes the step to make them realize how overrated they are. People belonging from this thought have the colonially subjugated mind with the basics of propaganda. Sociology defines this class of people as woke.

3. The final section of people has the absolute knowledge of what *shastras* have to offer and how modernity does not subscribe to it. Why? Since most of the scriptures have metaphorical verses which if decrypted, fall well with medicine, mental health, sexuality, values, consciousness and even the mighty cosmos. Therefore, the modernity of the post-modern world would never dare to accept it, in any way.

Bibek Debroy's translation of the Mahabharata had an important impact on me. Grasping a big epic like it, though being alien to its original language, made me fall for this piece of translation. It worked for many of my acquaintances for how easily it floated even in the absence of the poetry the Mahabharata is. One of the major crises the present society is going through is the clear dilemma among people between reaction and response. The delusion of both of these being the same is a major issue for the atmosphere of the civilization which is constantly trying to filter the philosophy. Bibek Debroy highlights the semiotics of Sanatana Dharma, and most of them stand in contrast to the semiotics of a world that calls itself 'modern'.

Some of the most important peripheries of Dharma have been historically highlighted through symbols and metaphors (semiotics). A person with *Brahmatya* or even someone inclined towards peeling off the vastness, would focus on the semiotics. Good translators, like Debroy, keep the privacy of a poem or a situation alive, for the various generations of the present and future. Modernity, along with people subscribing to it, channelizes the semiotics in their favor which forces the universality to fall down as sediments. Appeasing policies with forms of educating or awakening the mass has led to the downfall of the Hindu civilization, especially in the urban society which has more access to the physical and virtual world. This problem runs deep, and therefore, a Sanatani must address it constantly and continuously.

Ancient Semiotics

The semiotics of Dharma should be kept in focus, but if the various symbols and metaphors fall into the wrong hands, religion would lose its place. So, we get to see the introduction of various educational institutions in the ancient period focusing primarily towards cultivating the Sanatana of an individual. Bibek Debroy's translations could be easily considered as works which are meant to alleviate the identity of this great Hindu civilization. Following are some of the major semiotics a reader finds in the Puranas, but have never been quoted enough:

1. Let us begin with the *Bhagavata Purana*, wherein the birth of the Avatars of Narayana has a lot to do towards advocating 'desire'. Firstly, we get to read about Narasimha Deva's

desire of someone's lap after Prahalad says, "you are the creator of creators, so you would not understand the warmth of a good lap." With the birth of Rama, Narayana fulfils this desire, but Rama being the perfect one, has no friends. So, the desire of Rama was that of companionship. In the next incarnation, Narayana got to experience companionship through Krishna and all his manifestations. Krishna, on the other hand, had a lot of friends along with multiple lovers. Yet one day, when he asked Srimati Radharani about her love for a boy like him (who is perhaps the least handsome lad of Gokula), the former simply said that he would not understand the love of a woman unless he becomes Radharani/woman.

2. Following Bhishma Pitamah's war cry using his conch, Krishna blows his conch, Panchajanya. Veda Vyasa deliberately chose to not dumb down a philosophy by decrypting the meaning of this simple but important situation. The present world is not really aware of the difference between response and reaction. Krishna says, "I blew the conch merely as a response and so I am aware of what I am about to do. Those who react to a situation soon find themselves in trouble as they lack awareness."
3. Symbolism finds a new route through rituals present in the Vedas and puranas. According to the *Shastras*, these rituals are important to keep a person aware of what s/he is doing. Rules or *niyama* of the Vedic or puranic rituals subscribe to human consciousness and the basic science of nature. Therefore, one can easily say that one who is not a practising Hindu cannot be entitled as Hindu.
4. The masculine desire to feel the feminine psyche of a human body could be traced in many situations. For example, when Shiva makes love to Uma with the latter sitting naked on Shiva's lap, a king, flying in his chariot, laughed at them. He was cursed by Devi, and even when Shiva was playing the dominant role, Devi did not ask to be the dominant one the very next minute.
5. The *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Brahma Purana* say that a man should not chew Tulsi leaf since Tulsi is one of the lovers of Krishna. Let's consider it as a false narrative, but we cannot falsify the statement that Tulsi leaf if chewed could do severe damage to the teeth since it consists of Mercury (Hg).

The Modern Semiotics

After the introduction of Dravidian School of Philosophy, a new generation of intellectuals stood for their own ideology. Herein, caste system and misogyny became a major enemy of the

humanity. Opportunists left no stone unturned to declare a verbal and sometimes, physical war against those who take pride in being a Hindu. Little does anyone know that a Hindu always subscribes to the *Shastras*, and those who do not cannot be called as a Hindu.

Bibek Debroy does not have to say anything about the modern semiotics but the pop-culture mythological writers should read his books to have an impartial opinion of what they are creating. In modern semiotics, we find the *ganja* or weed smoking Shiva, and it is saddening to see the youth attaching this image to strengthen their smoke cycle. The *Shashtra* although says that the *ganja* in Shiva's hand magnifies the nature of Mahadeva as an absorber of toxicity.

Similarly, when Leena Manimekalai creates a film like *Kaali* with a woman dressed as Goddess Kali, it simply takes the history and worth of civilization for granted. From Chandi to Chinnamasta form of Kali, all of them have a different philosophy and story. The form of Kali that has been shown in the poster of the film goes completely against the blood-drinking avatars of Kali. Yet it has become easier to use this particular religion for personal benefits by those who are overtly against its *Shastras* and philosophy.

The modern society, especially post-2010, has been brainwashed by colonially channelised mythologists like Wendy Doniger. The eradication of the Sanatana philosophy for an entire era of Mughals majorly led to the blurry vision of the modern Hindus. Doniger chose to give this a clean whitewash. Similarly, the writer also gave her own interpretation of the verses of Hindu scriptures instead of keeping the philosophy the way it is.

An upcoming film of Om Raut named *Adipurush* blatantly uses the Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create a Rama who is ripped and creates a caricature out of Hanuman. With serious demand from the people of India, we got to see several muscular actors playing the role of male Gods which shows how the pop-culture is overpowering the Dharma.

Therefore, semiotics of the modern world is largely based on two things only. The first one focuses on creating an unpleasant atmosphere which is against the major religion of India or Bharata. The West being its instigator, the propaganda gets more importance for being the controller of the Indian Education system. The second one is loosely based on the formation of a world of mythology that should be visually appealing and so we get to see films like *Brahmastra*, *Adipurush* along with books that subscribe to the Western type of fantasy.

Conclusion

To sum up, as a reader and reviewer, more than a researcher, the semiotics of Sanatana Dharma has been newly explored by Bibek Debroy, making the scriptures translated from the original document, accessible to the readers all around the world. Even though fragments of the philosophy have been left for those who are deeply into exploring the Dharma, many parts are easy for the world to grasp. It is not unusual to see critics going against someone like Debroy, but it is surprising to see how the practicing Hindus too wait for his new translational work. It proves that he is going in the right way with a purpose.

If we focus on the modern semiotics, we would be able to understand the pop-culture manifestation of Gods, Goddesses, and Demigods. Also, how easy it has become for the outer world to see the cover of the entire philosophy and work by keeping the skin in mind. Therefore, the pop-culture mythology is largely people pleasing and hence, controlled by a handful of people. A portion likes to dictate it like a fanatic whereas the other voluntarily takes the task to slaughter it with verbal or communicative propaganda.

The ancient semiotics asks a Sanatani to explore the inner world more than the outer one. We know that the inner world has is infinite, making unimaginable things possible for those who want to act upon what they believe in. The peripheries of Hinduism are largely based on dissent, and therefore the Upanishads have been called as pessimistic documents which stays away from faith. In the same way, faith takes birth with Bhagavatam and stays in all the scriptures that follow it. Although, the core is still based upon dissent, the scriptures allow us to find the supreme reality by shedding Western idea of modernity and rationality.

Thus the focus of this essay has been primarily on the translational works of Bibek Debroy and how it should be done. Along with it, the spotlight also penetrates into the symbolic and metaphorical representation of the various social and personal ideas through Hinduism. Decolonizing the *rashtra* is still the gargantuan objective of this paper, but for now, I would like the readers/listeners to ponder upon the necessity of Indic documentation of our civilization.

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